

Paying Football Coaches Not to Coach: The Mounting Costs of FBS Buyouts
(As of Nov. 15, 2023)

Since the College Football Playoff (CFP) began in Fiscal Year 2015, Knight-Newhouse data show that buyouts for FBS football coaches at **FBS PUBLIC** institutions tripled. (See Table 1 below). In the three years prior to the initial CFP, FBS coaching buyouts at FBS public institutions averaged about \$30 million a year. In the seven years after the CFP began, the average tally of payouts at public universities jumped to more than \$72 million a year.

These tallies significantly understate the soaring costs of FBS coaching buyouts for two reasons. They do not account for coaching severance for Fiscal Year 2023 and 2024, with the record-breaking payout at Texas A&M to its head coach (\$76 million), and the data only cover coaching buyouts at public institutions. [Note: Institutionally reported and audited data for FY23 will be accessible in our database in April 2024.] [Reported buyouts for head coaches at Power 5 schools since last season (FY23 and FY24) are summarized in Table 2.]

Ballooning Buyouts: 2022 Fiscal Year Severance Buyouts Approached \$100 Million

Table 1

Fiscal Year		Severance total football coaches*
2012		\$32,008,085
2013		\$36,991,525
2014		\$21,775,028
2015		\$32,266,774
2016		\$39,907,158
2017		\$48,322,114
2018		\$104,132,251
2019		\$68,883,771
2020		\$61,069,366
2021		\$84,668,857
2022		\$98,166,702
Grand Total		\$628,191,631

Source: Knight-Newhouse College Athletics Database.

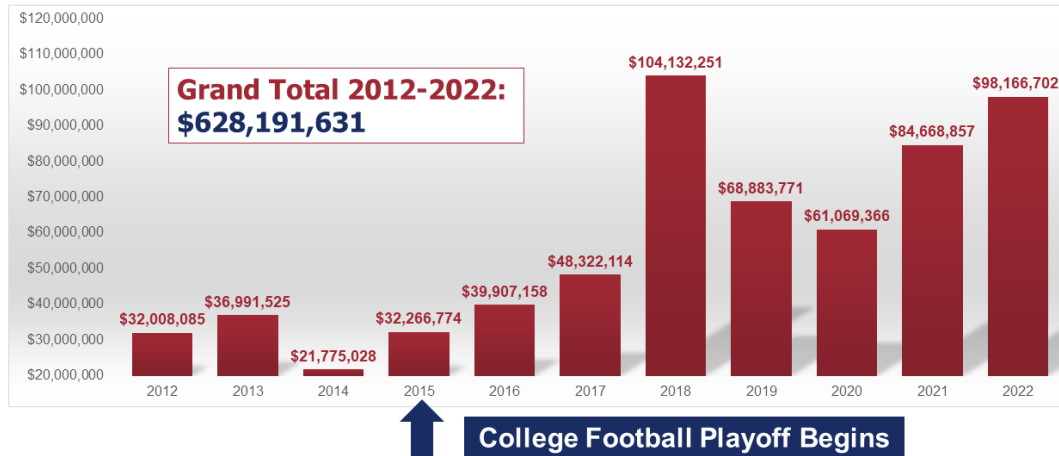
Data reported by institutions on NCAA Financial Report forms.

*Note: Total Severance from database includes football head and assistant coaches



Ballooning Buyouts: Head and Assistant Football Coaches Severance

Public FBS Institutions – 2012-2022 **ACTUAL**



Source: Knight-Newhouse College Athletics Data. Data reported by public institutions on NCAA Financial Report forms.
Note: Total Severance includes only football head and assistant coaches

Two Most Recent Seasons (Fall 22 and Fall 23) – Knight-Newhouse Research on Football Head Coach Severance Payouts [Note: The total severance amounts will be larger since many will include payouts to assistant coaches who transition with the head coach]:

- **As of November 15, 2023, in the past two seasons alone, 8 Power 5 Head football coaches (public schools) have been fired with combined buyouts totaling \$145 Million, including the record-breaking payout at Texas A&M to their head coach (\$76 million). See Table 2 attached.**

The “Cost of Doing Business” Copout

- The staggering payments made to fired FBS football coaches are often dismissed by college presidents, trustees, and athletic directors as no more than the “cost of doing business,” particularly at Power Five schools. In fact, these wasted millions are one of the clearest signs yet of financial dysfunction at FBS schools and the urgent need to overhaul the governance of FBS football and its financial framework. It is not inevitable that non-profit educational institutions, especially publicly funded institutions, should dish out tens of millions of dollars to fired football coaches.
- In September 2021, the Knight Commission proposed a solution (our [2021 C.A.R.E. Model](#)) that would enable conferences instituting new financial frameworks in accordance with C.A.R.E. Model principles to implement penalties on schools and teams for excessive coaching buyouts and compensation. This type of system would be akin to “luxury taxes” in pro sports. Such a conference-based system would not violate antitrust laws.

- Division I sports need a more sophisticated financial framework that ensures more revenues are connected to their core mission—athletes’ education, health, safety, and success. If FBS leaders do not act, the problem of ballooning buyouts and wasted dollars will soon get much worse, as revenues from the upcoming CFP media contract and expanded playoff are estimated to generate more than \$1 billion annually in new revenues. Knight Commission recommendations on how these new and uncommitted CFP revenues should be used, can be found [here](#).

Len Elmore on trends in Washington Post on Oct. 7, 2022:



Knight Commission co-chair Len Elmore

Washington Post, October 7, 2022,
on multi-million dollar buyouts for fired college football coaches

“You hear athletic directors say, ‘This is the cost of business.’
But it’s really not. What it is is that there is more money than ever
available for them to throw at these coaches.

With this windfall (revenue from conference broadcast deals and the
College Football Playoff), it’s almost like ADs — and even the college
presidents who okay it — are playing with Monopoly money.

It’s just setting a trend that is spiraling out of control.”

**Knight-Newhouse Research on Football Head Coach Buyouts for Power 5 Conferences only
(*As of November 15, 2023)**

FY23 (2022 Season) and FY24 to date (2023 Season)

Table 2

Institution	Fired Coach	Buyout total (In Millions)	Source
FY23 (2022 Season)			
Auburn	Bryan Harsin	\$15.58	https://twitter.com/PeteThamel/status/1587128600746147842
Arizona St. (updated settlement Oct. 3., 2022)	Herm Edwards	*\$4.40	https://www.statepress.com/article/2022/10/herm-edwards-50-percent-buyout-contract
Colorado (updated 10.2.22)	Karl Dorrell	\$8.70	https://www.on3.com/college/colorado-buffaloes/news/colorado-releases-buyout-details-karl-dorrell-announces-interim-head-coach-mike-sanford/
Georgia Tech	Geoff Collins	\$11.30	https://www.espn.com/college-football/story/_/id/34670009/sources-georgia-tech-yellow-jackets-fire-ad-todd-stansbury-football-coach-geoff-collins
Nebraska	Scott Frost	\$15	https://journalstar.com/sports/huskers/football/scott-frost-receives-full-buyout-as-nebraska-severance-bill-tops-50-million-since-2005/article_512e140e-d89e-5193-bd8b-9ef6b23abeae.html
Wisconsin	Paul Chryst	\$11	https://www.jsonline.com/story/sports/college/uw/2022/10/03/wisconsin-pay-fired-football-coach-paul-chryst-11-million-buyout/8171623001/
FY24 (2023 Season)			
Texas A&M	Jimbo Fisher	\$76	https://www.espn.com/college-football/story/_/id/38880082/jimbo-fisher-expected-fired-texas-sources-confirm
Mississippi State	Zach Arnett	\$4	https://www.espn.com/college-football/story/_/id/38888927/mississippi-state-fires-head-football-coach-zach-arnett
GRAND TOTAL		\$145.98	

*ASU reached a settlement with Edwards post-firing that reduced their contracted buyout figure.

Updated Nov. 15, 2023